DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 063 093 RE 004 146

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TITLE Evaluating Reading Growth.
PUB DATE 12 May 72
NOTE 6p.; A paper presented at the annual convention of the International Reading Association (17th, Detroit, Mich., May 10-13, 1972)

EDRS PRICE MF-$0.65 HC-$3.29
DESCRIPTORS Educational Technology; *Evaluation Needs; Individualized Instruction; Measurement Goals; *Reading Instruction; *Teacher Participation

ABSTRACT

Reading instruction aims at developing meaning and understanding; achievement of its goals depends on the continuous, consistent, and systematic evaluation of all aspects of a reading program. Since isolated skills have little value unless related to some pattern with built-in, designated levels of achievement, reading should be taught as a closely knit system of experiences, principles, and processes. Both instruction and evaluation should be planned and constructed with care. Evaluative procedures used to measure reading progress must focus on all aspects of a balanced and sound program and must be both reliable and valid. In its fullest sense, reading evaluation should (1) focus on new knowledge uncovered through basic and applied research studies, (2) provide opportunities for teachers to become fully involved in the evaluation process, and (3) determine if the breadth, depth, and scope is adequate for present and future reading needs. As individualized reading instruction demands complete records of reading growth, advances in technology can help lighten the work load of the teachers. (AW)

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EVALUATING READING GROWTH

Section: Reading Evaluation
Friday, May 12, 1972 1:30 - 2:30 P.M.

Instruction in reading as in other fields should have as a prime objective the goals of developing meaning and understanding and helping a child see sense in what he does. Students of the teaching of reading have long been aware of the fact that in order to achieve these goals reading programs must have breadth, depth, and scope. Students of the teaching of reading have also been aware of the fact that the achievement of all goals depends on the continuous, consistent, and systematic evaluation of all aspects of a reading program.

The psychology of reading as indicated by trends in the last decade stresses the point of view that teachers should not view reading instruction as a number of discrete unrelated elements to be taught incidently, by repetitive drill or through the almost exclusive use of narrow programs tied to machines or printed material of a rigid nature.

An analysis of the psychological studies of the reading process seems to indicate that reading should be taught as a closely knit system of skills, experiences, principles and processes. It would

RE004 146

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seem important that instruction in reading should be planned and constructed with as much care and creativity as a well designed building. Simple fundamental skills, experiences, principles and processes should be taught first and built carefully in the early years. The more complex ones can then be joined with these and continuously related and interrelated into larger and more significant patterns.

Reading evaluation if it is to be effective must follow a like pattern. Early evaluation should test skill level and the degree of meaning and understanding achieved with the acquisition of the simple fundamental experiences, principles and processes. The simple relationships and interrelationships stressed in the early years must also be tested in light of the over-all design for growth and the pattern of instruction.

This makes organization in the teaching and evaluation of reading a necessity. Isolated experiences, skills, and processes have little value unless they are related to some design or pattern with built in levels of achievement designated at points in the design. The function of teaching and learning is to enlarge a child's pattern of understanding so that all additional knowledge can be fitted into the over-all design and as a result take on meaning.

It is much easier to fit pieces of a puzzle together when both the teacher and learner have in mind what the completed picture should look like. New experiences and skills are more readily assimilated and used when the final organizational pattern makes sense to the teacher and learner.

A narrow definition of reading, vague and non-related goals, lack of a design for instruction, over-emphasis on performance objectives with their limited scope and pattern can lead to trouble. A headlong rush by educators to use non-standardized measures of evaluation such as criterion referenced tests tied to a program or series, or to choose tests because they show strengths in reading and ignore weak areas can lead to catastrophe. Evaluative procedures used to measure progress in reading must focus on all aspects of a balanced and sound program and must be both valid and reliable.

Reading evaluation in its fullest sense should have a three dimensional emphasis. The first dimension should focus on new knowledge uncovered through basic and applied research studies. The reading needs of educated adults change with each new generation and with each new advance in technology. The measures used to evaluate growth in reading skills for one generation can be outdated and too limited in scope, breadth, and depth for the next. Twenty years ago few libraries were equipped with microfilm readers and certainly graduate students compiled their own bibliographies. The Eric-Crier Clearing House on Reading is relatively new. Today a driver of an automobile must have the ability to read rapidly if he is to survive on one of the modern expressways with their numerous signs and high speed lanes.

The second dimension should provide opportunities for teachers to become fully involved in the evaluation process. We have in our classrooms today the most highly educated and knowledgeable group of teachers in the history of American education. Therefore, teachers should examine, test, and experiment with all approaches, procedures, materials, and

methods used in evaluation before they are put into widespread use. Field testing, under real conditions is vital to accurate evaluation in reading.

The third dimension should focus on the evaluation process to determine if the breadth, depth and scope is adequate for present and future needs in reading. The evaluation process by necessity should provide for accurate diagnosis of present needs in reading. However, it should also be broad enough in design to furnish data for the projected needs of the future.

Evaluating reading progress and charting reading growth will be an integral and important part of all sound reading programs in the next decade. Evaluation will be a part of every classroom and will be consistent, systematic, and continuous on all aspects of reading. Since most of the responsibility for evaluation will fall upon the classroom teacher who is already overburdened with increased class size and lack of materials because of financial cutbacks in educational funds an intensive search must be made for ways to lighten the load.

Individualization of instruction in reading by its very nature demands that complete records of reading growth be kept on each child on a daily, weekly and monthly basis. Currently because of educational cutbacks and the release of teachers class size in metropolitan areas is climbing into the thirty-three to thirty-five children per class range. Record keeping for classes of this size can be an almost impossible burden for one teacher. Therefore a search must be made for efficient and effective procedures classroom teachers can use to aid in diagnosing reading needs and evaluating reading growth.

Advances in technology and the increased availability of instructional instruments in schools can perhaps help lighten the record keeping load to some degree. In the past if a teacher did not want to depend entirely on commercially prepared materials almost all visual instructional work had to be handwritten and then reproduced on a blackboard or the typewriter.

Today the overhead projector has freed teachers of laborious board writing because by its use work can be prepared ahead of time or be reproduced quickly and easily for use by an individual or small and large groups. It is also possible to reproduce on the overhead instantaneous evaluative exercises of a much different type than has been used in classrooms in the past.

The cassette tape recorder has made it possible for teachers to make oral records of children's work and then send the tape to the next teacher when a child changes classrooms. In the past such evaluations were usually handwritten and because of this were usually brief and general in nature.

Many school systems are developing their reading goals and objectives in such a way that progress can be evaluated and then recorded on a check sheet. The data from the check sheet can then be transferred to cards and fed into a computer. Print-outs are then provided for use by the classroom teacher on a weekly or monthly schedule for each child. These print-outs provide continuous up to date information relative to a child's progress on the skills tested.

Photo-copying machines can be used to duplicate records and thus free a teacher or the over-worked secretary from the mimeograph machine.

Machine scoring of all standardized tests is common practice today. The information provided by these tests is important for diagnosis and the evaluation of reading growth. It would be helpful if all manuals for standardized tests provided a breakdown of the skills tested by item grouping so that remedial techniques could be keyed to specific parts of a test.

In order to provide continuous, consistent, and systematic evaluation of reading growth on a broad front in the future it will be necessary for all individuals and groups of individuals concerned with the education of children to work together. If a child is to see sense in what he does then the educational community must plan and evaluate reading instruction in a meaningful and sensible manner.